



Arab Media Watch
for objective British coverage of Arab issues

Monitoring Study:

British media reaction to the Saudi state visit

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Summary

British media opinions on Saudi Arabia have always been highly vocal, passionate and polarised. This has perhaps never been more true than during the recent Saudi state visit to the UK, which elicited very strong reactions not just about the visit itself, but also bilateral relations, and the Saudi leadership's domestic and foreign influence. The media's reactions to this visit can thus be described as representative of its views on Saudi Arabia in general.

As such, an in-depth study by Arab Media Watch of opinions expressed in Britain's broadsheets and tabloids during that time (29 October - 5 November 2007) spells bad news for Saudi Arabia's image, and more specifically, that of its government. Of the 11 newspapers monitored, only three contained more words expressing positive opinion than negative: the Daily Express (more than five times as many), Daily Telegraph (more than twice as many), and The Times (almost twice as many).

In fact, of the eight newspapers with predominantly negative commentary, three had nothing positive to say whatsoever: The Sun, Daily Mirror and Daily Star. This is interesting because The Sun is the sister newspaper of The Times, as is the Star of the Express. Of the total 12,595 relevant words expressed as opinions in the 11 newspapers, 69% (8,678) were negative, more than double those that were positive (3,917).

Furthermore, there were 50% more items (mainly editorials and commentaries) expressing negative sentiment (36) than those expressing positive sentiment (24 items). The Evening Standard, The Independent and The Times published more items containing negative sentiment than positive (three times and twice as many, in the case of the first two newspapers). The Express, Daily Mail, Telegraph, Financial Times and The Guardian published a balanced number of items.

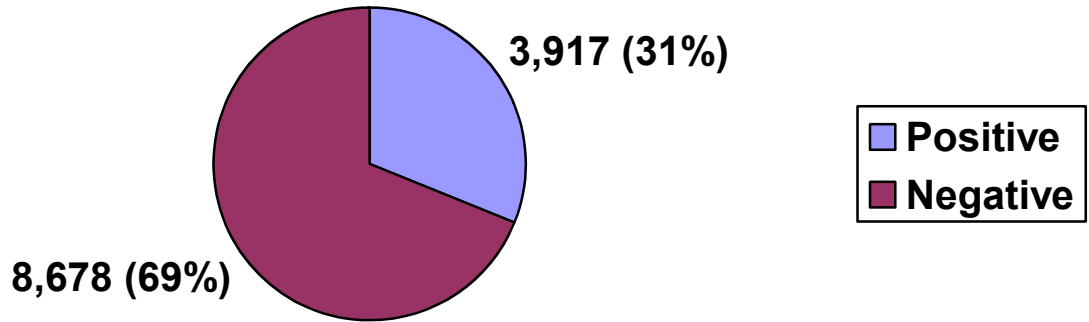
The Independent published the most opinion in total (3,504 words), followed by The Guardian (1,891) and The Times (1,868). The Sun published the least (78), followed by the Express (126) and the Star (194).

The Telegraph published the largest number of positive words (1,242), followed by The Times (1,180) and The Independent (604). The Standard published the least (28), followed by the FT (56) and the Express (106).

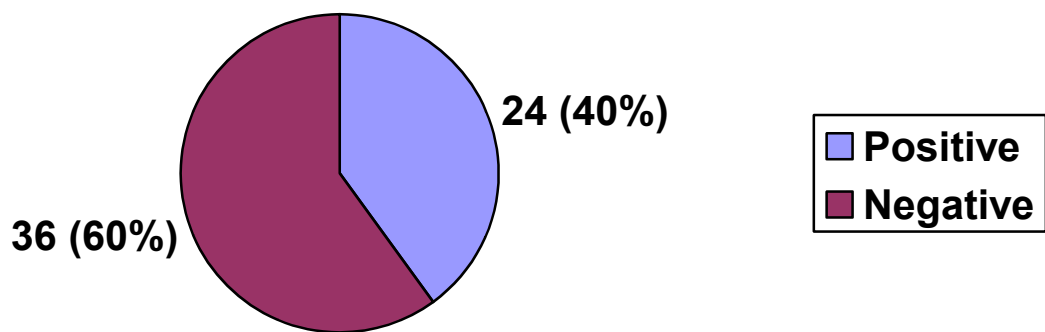
The Independent published the largest number of negative words (2,900), followed by The Guardian (1,437) and the Mail (1,068). The Express published the least (20), followed by The Sun (78) and the Star (194).

Of the newspapers that published more words expressing negative sentiment than positive, the Standard published more than 18 times as many, the FT more than seven times, The Independent almost five times, the Mail more than four times, and the Guardian more than three.

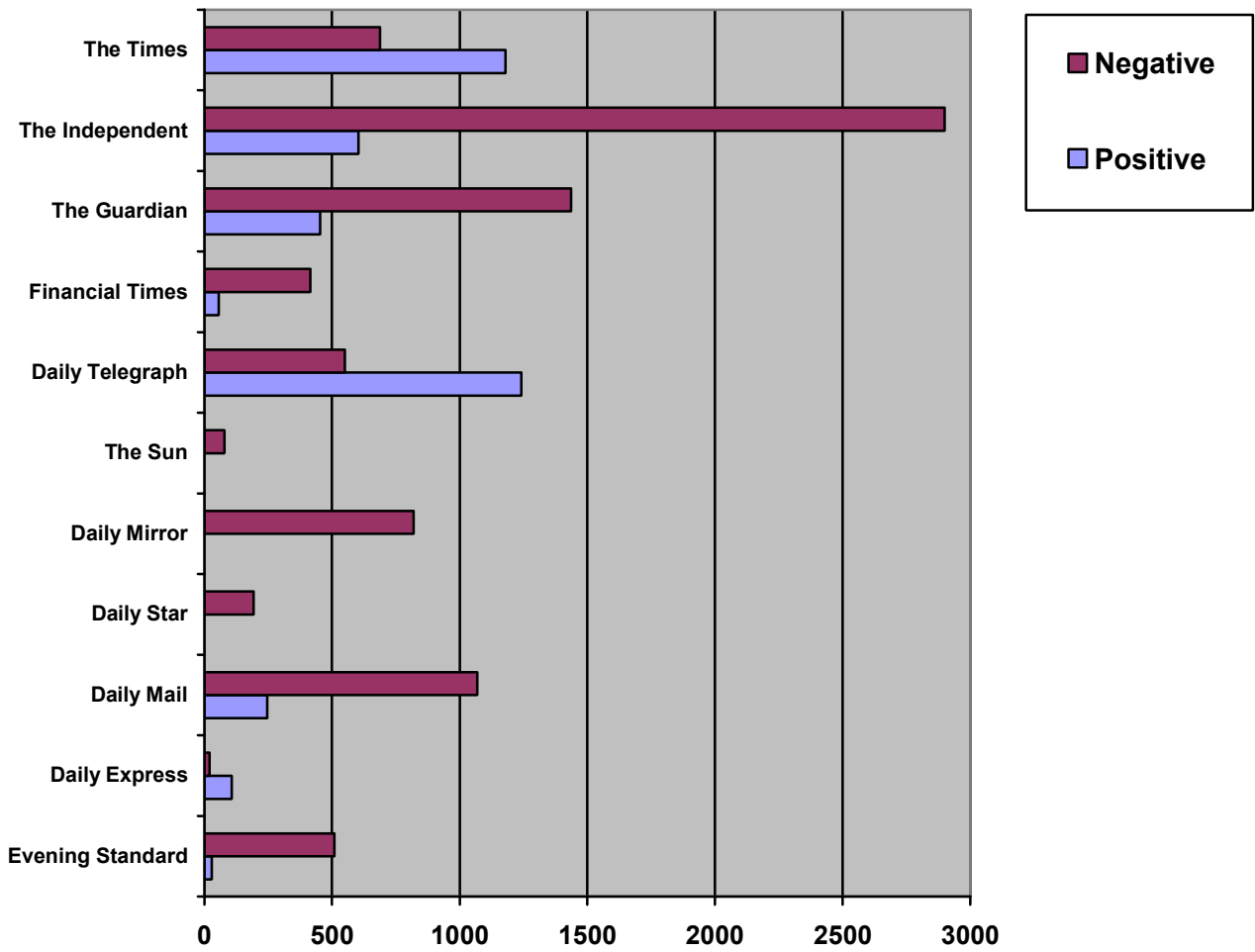
Total Words



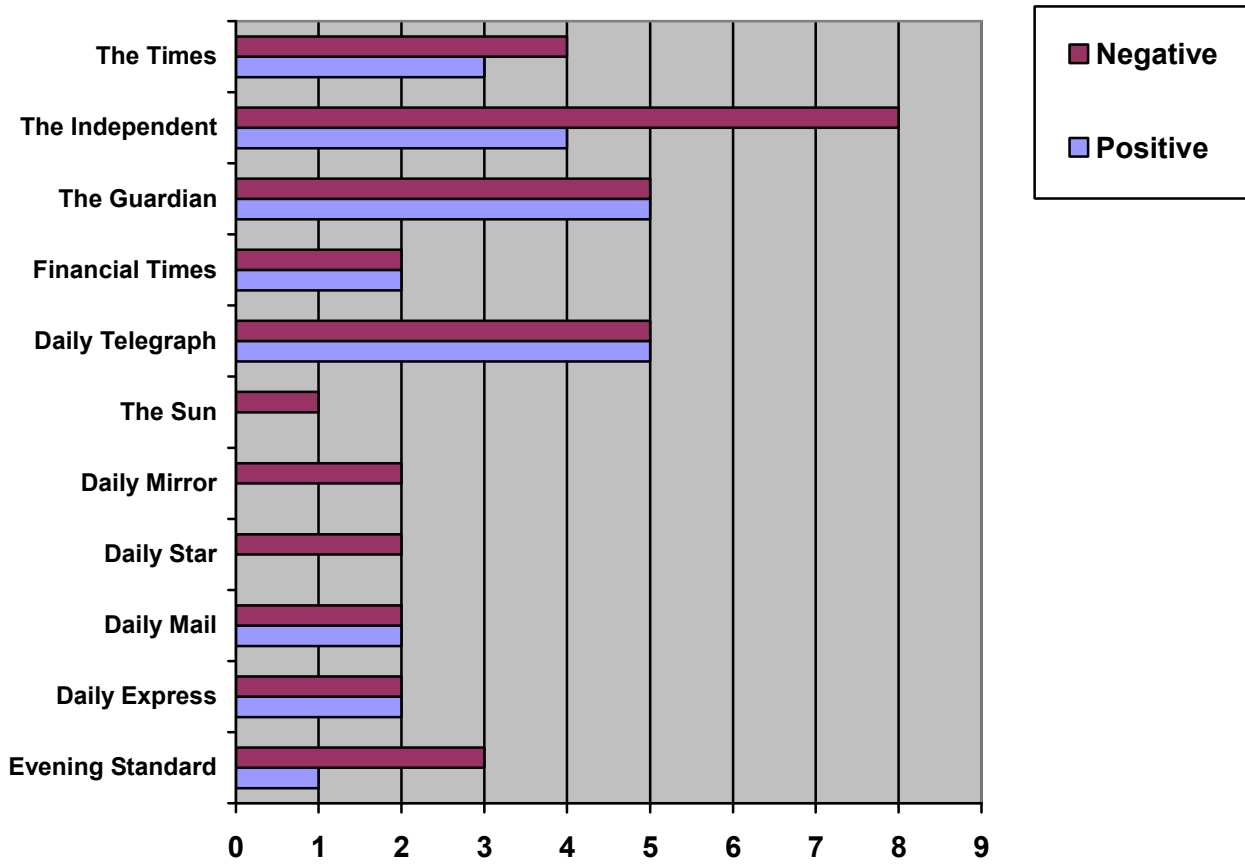
Total Items



Words by Newspaper



Items by Newspaper



Evening Standard

Positive comments – 28 words, 1 item

Editorial - 29 October 2007

"...the Saudi regime has now woken up to the threat posed to it by al Qaeda..."

"...the kingdom has taken more action against terrorist networks in recent years."

Negative comments – 509 words, 3 items

Nick Cohen - 31 October 2007

"Saudi money is swamping British Islam with sectarian, homophobic, racist, misogynist and anti-democratic propaganda. Just as the Attorney General abandons the rule of law to spare the Saudis the indignity of a Serious Fraud Office investigation, so everyone in government abandons the national interest to forgive the Saudis for their vast propaganda operation. British Muslims, fortunately, are speaking out."

Joan Smith - 30 October 2007

"What does Gordon Brown's government have to say to a leader whose regime uses barbaric punishments and denies women the most human basic rights? I'm talking about a country where women are not allowed to drive, or to leave home unless they are heavily veiled, where Christians have to worship in secret and gay men are flogged until close to death. The answer is, of course, 'Welcome to London, your Majesty.' That didn't stop King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who is in the UK on a state visit this week, attacking his hosts for (supposedly) not doing enough to counter international terrorism."

"I hope that the Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells will remind the King that the paranoid Saudi branch of Islam has been responsible for encouraging jihad in country after country, including the UK. Is that what Mr Howells meant yesterday when he referred to our 'shared values'? He could also bring up the admission by Saudi intelligence after 9/11 that 25,000 Saudi men had received military training abroad since 1979. The most prominent is Osama bin Laden..."

"Eighty-two year old King Abdullah is supposed to be a reformer and the Ministry of Labour has said it wants to increase the number of working women in Saudi Arabia. But they still need the permission of their male guardians, and a woman's job will not be allowed to 'lead to social or moral problems'."

"The British government will no doubt say it has to maintain relations with all sorts of regimes, and Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest customers of the British arms industry. But I can't help wondering how Labour MPs feel about the Government rolling out a gold coach and the Queen for someone most of them wouldn't touch with a bargepole."

Editorial - 29 October 2007

"Today's rare visit to the UK by Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah was always likely to be a strained affair... Liberal Democrat acting leader Vince Cable is principled in boycotting the visit."

"...the King has...managed to insult his hosts by claiming Britain is not doing enough to tackle terrorism...we need take no lectures on terrorism from this reactionary monarch."

"Saudi Arabia has long been one of the West's more embarrassing allies, with its brazen rejection of democracy, dismal human rights record, rampant corruption and medieval attitudes towards women's rights."

"Saudi Arabia has almost single-handedly encouraged the spread of extremist Sunni Islam, and above all the teachings of its own dominant Wahabi sect, through its vast funding internationally for mosques, madrassas and other institutions. It is hardly surprising that 15 of the 19 9/11 bombers were Saudis."

"Saudi Arabia's importance as a source of oil and of lucrative arms deals almost inevitably distorts our relationship with it."

Daily Express

Positive comments – 106 words, 2 items

Frederick Forsyth - 2 November 2007

"Compared to some of the brutes our governments have imposed on the long-suffering lady at the end of the Mall, old King Abdullah is a part-timer. But so long as the horrors are Left-wing horrors rather than resolute allies in a very scary world, our native pinkoes will always drool in praise of them."

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is not everyone's cup of tea but having invited him to Britain it is incumbent upon the Government to pull out the stops for him. It is unbecoming that the Foreign Secretary should abandon his post during the highly sensitive visit of such an important overseas ally."

Negative comments – 20 words, 2 items

Frederick Forsyth - 2 November 2007

"...Saudi Arabia...is somewhat short of being a liberal democracy."

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is not everyone's cup of tea..."

Daily Mail

Positive comments – 247 words, 2 items

Peter McKay - 5 November 2007

"Why is it considered right for Foreign Secretary David Miliband to be present at the birth of his adopted son in America rather than being on duty during an official visit here by Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah?"

Stephen Glover - 1 November 2007

"...there are grounds for fearing that David Miliband may yet turn out to be one of the most undistinguished Foreign Secretaries of recent times...This week Mr Miliband shortened the odds of winning this prize by cancelling a meeting at short notice which he had been due to have with his Saudi Arabian counterpart, Prince Saud al-Faisal, who is visiting London with King Abdullah...it is surely not good practice to stand up the Foreign Minister of any country, much less an important ally, without a very good reason. Mr Miliband's excuse was that he had to fly to America with his wife, Louise, to be at the birth of their newly adopted son, who was born prematurely. I doubt this constitutes a very good reason. In the event, they were too late to be present at the birth. However, their adopted son, Jacob, would hardly have been aware that they had not made it in time, and is not very likely to hold it against them later...Let us just say that there are grounds for wondering about Mr Miliband's sense of priorities...it would be reassuring to know that our new Foreign Secretary had a keen sense of duty, and that we could depend on him not to disappear in a crisis."

Negative comments – 1,068 words, 2 items

Peter Osborne - 3 November 2007

"Foreign Secretary David Miliband has come in for severe criticism following his decision to fly to the United States in order to witness the birth of his adopted baby. It is alleged that he ought to have been present in London to welcome King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. I cannot understand this point of view. Most ordinary, decent people will surely feel that it was the Foreign Secretary's primary duty to be with his wife at this momentous time in his family's life, and wholeheartedly support him in his decision. Important though state visits undoubtedly are, they cannot be compared to the birth of a child."

Michael Burleigh - 30 October 2007

"The arrival yesterday of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia on a state visit has already generated more than the usual share of hypocrisy from both sides of a relationship built not on affection but on oil and commerce. Even before he set off from Riyadh, the King chided our security services for allegedly ignoring Saudi warnings about the imminence of the 7/7 London bombings and for being half-hearted in combating terrorism. Since Saudi Arabia is perhaps the most potent force behind global terrorism, promoting a deeply fundamentalist strain of Islamic theology worldwide, this must be one of the most hypocritical statements of all time. But bizarre claims have come from our side too. Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells has spoken of the 'shared values' between our two countries. What shared values? Was he thinking of Riyadh's 'Chop-Chop Square' where adulterers and thieves lose heads or arms under the kingdom's brutal Sharia law? Was he referring to the scores of Saudi political dissenters executed and tortured every year? Perhaps he meant the Saudis' treatment of women who are, in effect, kept under

house arrest, banned from driving or leaving their home without a male guardian and made to dress 'modestly' - in other words covered from head to toe. He presumably did not mean Tony Blair's suppression of a corruption probe into British Aerospace's alleged bribery of the ruling dynasty to secure a multi-billion arms contract."

"In the coming days, the Saudis will claim that both Osama Bin Laden and the 15 Saudi 9/11 hijackers had no deeper connection to the culture and mores of the kingdom than that they were born and educated there. Just as they did unconvincingly after 9/11, the Saudis will trumpet their new-found resolve in combating domestic terrorism, while promoting the idea of a UN centre to co-ordinate information on international threats and touting their peace plan for the Middle East. Gordon Brown will make emollient noises in return for what will inevitably be further lucrative contracts...But all of this polite verbiage conceals stark realities. For the truth is that for nearly three decades now, the Saudis have been exporting their indigenous extremists all over the world."

"It was in 1979 that Saudi fundamentalists - fuelled by mass unemployment as well as the vast wealth, corruption and hypocrisy of the royal dynasty - stormed and occupied the holy shrine at Mecca, killing and capturing hundreds of pilgrims. The Saudi authorities retook the mosque but they placated the growing unrest by introducing a religious crackdown and ensuring that strict Islamic codes were enforced. They also encouraged fundamentalists to find trouble elsewhere - to go to Afghanistan and fight the atheist Soviets, even providing them with cheap flights and cash for weapons. In this way, the authorities played a major role in financing what coalesced into Al Qaeda, whose leader, Bin Laden, is the spoilt scion of the largest Saudi construction firm. So keen have they been to bury this connection that London's libel courts have been used to obliterate an academic book called *Alms for Jihad* for daring to broach this subject."

"...disturbingly, Saudi Arabia has used its vast oil wealth to purvey on a global scale the austere Wahhabist strain of Islam on which the Saud dynasty's legitimacy rests, but which poisons young minds and fuels murderous anti-Jewish and anti-western resentment."

"Saudi money talks in poorer countries, which is why, wherever you go, from Egypt to Ethiopia, the Gulf Arabs are bitterly resented. Observing a couple of them last week knocking back doubles in the bar of a luxury Cairo hotel I can see why - and that is before they go to the call-girls and casinos, as they routinely do in Mayfair and Monaco."

"In Ethiopia, the Saudis have built hundreds of mosques, giving its poor citizens bribes of £300 a time to convert to Islam...Far more serious inroads have been made by Wahhabists through the thousands of madrassas they have established in Pakistan and the pasatrens in Indonesia, the two most populous Muslim states. Instead of a decent school system which might equip boys and girls for gainful employment, these religious seminaries teach them rote learning of the Koran and a host of noxious attitudes...the Wahhabists have been hyper-active closer to home. A shocking report by the Policy Exchange think-tank reveals that the Saudis are behind a range of extremist texts that are openly available in a quarter of the British mosques surveyed."

"In...Somalia, a failed state which Islamist extremists are endeavouring to take over, Saudi-style religious police - the Mutawiun - now patrol the streets looking out for such dangerous manifestations of western culture as Barbie dolls."

"Instead of claiming that our commercial links with Saudi Arabia trump everything else, we need a much more sober analysis of the costs and benefits of our relationship. This should begin with our

insistence that the Saudis take full responsibility for the export of extremists and the hateful propaganda that has a detrimental impact on our Muslim youth."

"We should...demand total transparency regarding the origins of so-called charitable funds that wash in here and elsewhere from the kingdom."

"Since Saudi Arabia practises absolute intolerance toward other faiths - notably Christianity - it is unacceptable that there should be no reciprocity regarding their capacity to build ever larger mosques here, while the mere ringing of a church bell in Jeddah or Riyadh is forbidden...it is incumbent on any members of the British Establishment, notably the Church of England and the Royal Family, to inform themselves about who they are extending the hand of friendship to in the interests of a wishy-washy ecumenicism and a shared interest in horses. Our Government should make it very clear that we are no longer prepared to have friends who act like two-faced enemies."

Daily Star

Negative comments – 194 words, 2 items

Dominik Diamond

3 November 2007

"If it wasn't bad enough to lick his backside at a formal reception, special mention must go to our Prime Minister for the £3000 of taxpayers money he spent on 'white tie and tails' to wear when he ate with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia this week. Your country is very proud of you, Sir!"

31 October 2007

"Saudi Arabia is a horrible place to live for many people. Women are treated like scum and have to carry yellow cards stating their husband's permission for them to be walking around."

"There is no political opposition allowed and any dissenters against the regime of King Abdullah are treated viciously and inhumanely, normally at the point of a sword."

"...King Abdullah...comes over here and tells US we should be doing more to combat terror when, at the last count, there were more than a handful of al-Qaeda cohorts from his country. Yet MPs over here kiss his backside, because he's got money."

"...the acting leader of the Lib Dems, Vincent Cable has REFUSED to attend the state dinner in the Saudi monarch's honour. Fair play, sir! A Liberal Democrat with bigger balls than anyone else in Parliament. Whatever next?"

Daily Mirror

Negative comments – 819 words, 2 items

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"The red-carpet treatment rolled out for King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is an insult to the tens of thousands of his victims."

"The monarch's regime is one of the most brutal in the world, torturing opponents and oppressing women who are banned from even driving cars. So the widespread condemnation and protests at his state visit should come as no surprise to a government cheapening itself by rewarding him with a banquet and ride up the Mall in a golden carriage alongside the Queen."

"King Abdullah should be lectured about human rights, not feted by a Prime Minister in white tails."

"...most of the September 11 hijackers were Saudi-born and the kingdom finances militant madrassas that preach hate."

"Britons framed on alcohol charges were abused to cover up bomb attacks, while the contemptible Saudis threatened to suspend co-operation unless a bribery inquiry into arms deals was halted."

Kevin Toolis - 30 October 2007

"In the Mall near Buckingham Palace the flags are flying to welcome royal visitor King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, the ruler of Saudi Arabia. Downing Street is rolling out the red carpet. And Abdullah has been promised a ride in the Queen's carriage and a dinner at the Palace. But those flags should be hanging at half-mast in shame to see the Queen so closely associated with the leader of this blood-stained regime...When you ride with the devil, even in a gilded carriage down the Mall, the only destination is hell...When the Serious Fraud Office uncovered huge bribes being paid to Saudi princes over British arms deals, our Prime Minister Tony Blair stopped the investigation. Like this visit, it was a shameful day for British democracy. Proof that even Downing Street can be silenced. To add insult to injury, King Abdullah - even before his sandals touched British soil - warned that we were not doing enough to counter terrorism."

"For decades Abdullah and his relatives have enjoyed the wealth generated by the desert kingdom's vast oil reserves and squandered it on whores, palaces and private jets. But their corruption stains all it touches - even the laws of Britain."

"Listening to Abdullah lecture us on terrorism is like the Mafia criticising the Pope for not working harder to stop crime."

"...if there is one state on Earth that is an incubator of terrorism it is Saudi Arabia."

"Ever since Saudi Arabia was established in 1932, the Al Saud family has ruled it as their private fiefdom with the country's oilfields - 40 per cent of the world's known reserves - their personal piggy bank. Over the years the list of cronies, retainers and 'princes' has grown ever more bloated with estimates of the 'royal family' ranging from 7,000 to 25,000. It is government by larceny with estimates that the royal family has burned through one trillion dollars - about £500,000,000,000. But despite this

torrent of cash, these royal princes have done little to develop their own country. According to the World Bank, the average Saudi wage is just £5,000 a year. In Riyadh, the capital, thousands of young graduates seethe with resentment."

"To keep their power and wealth intact, the house of Saud has long entered a devil's bargain with the country's fanatical mullahs. In return for their support, the dynasty, in public at least, promotes a fanatical Islamic sect called Salafism. In this vicious creed most other Muslims, never mind Christians, are infidels who should be killed or enslaved. It is a doctrine of hatred, yet it is the official state religion. Women are not allowed to drive or to appear without a headscarf in public. Women and men cannot work together. Women can be beaten, even killed, by their husbands without sanction. No one outside the royal family has any rights. Nor are there any meaningful political parties. Prisoners, recently including three expatriate Britons, are liable to be tortured. 'Criminals' are beheaded in public. The aim is to keep society pure, whatever the human cost. But Salafism has an anti-Western core...But worse still, it is reported that some of this vast oil wealth has been channelled into exporting Salafism across the Islamic world via 'donations' for new mosques, preachers' salaries and religious scholarships...And the creed practised by the 7/7 bombers...was Salafism."

"From Pakistan to Malaysia to the back streets of Bradford, it's not hard to find the trail of Saudi Arabian money. But it is a gift that comes at a terrible price. Through preachers, DVDs and CDs, there is the same unrelenting hatred for the West."

"Trapped and frustrated by the hypocrites of the royal family above them, it is easy to see how young Saudis, like the 9/11 hijackers, can turn to Osama Bin Laden."

"Before the recent rise in oil prices the Saudi economy was on the verge of bankruptcy. But with oil now hitting \$93 a barrel, the kingdom again enjoys a gusher of cash. And that means more corruption and exported terrorism."

The Sun

Negative comments – 78 words, 1 item

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"Saudi King Abdullah has some nerve lecturing us on the fight against terror...Instead of lecturing us, the King could make a real contribution to world peace. By shutting down the cash flow that keeps international jihad in business."

"Saudi Arabia is the home of al-Qaeda. Osama bin Laden was born there. So were 13 of the September 11 killers."

"King Abdullah only survives because of a pact with Islamic fanatics who use petrodollars to finance terror cells abroad."

Daily Telegraph

Positive comments – 1,242 words, 5 items

Roger Bootle - 5 November 2007

"The media coverage of last week's visit by the Saudi king was dominated by protests about his country's human rights record. But much of the serious talking at the meetings between Saudi and British officials was about trade and economic issues."

"...as well as the sense of our security interests being intertwined, the belief that economic interests are so important has dictated that we maintain a close and friendly relationship with Saudi in particular...We all recognise its supreme importance in relation to oil. Indeed, 60pc of the world's oil reserves are in the region as a whole and about 20pc in Saudi Arabia alone. About 30pc of the world's oil production comes from the region and 13pc just from Saudi Arabia."

"...Saudi's role in managing the global oil price makes it an especially important country for us and the world."

"Saudi Arabia accounts for roughly 30pc of the Middle East economy."

"...the region in general and Saudi Arabia in particular have been growing rapidly. Last year, the Middle East's GDP grew by almost 6pc in real terms...Something like this growth rate should continue for the next few years."

"...this is one of the few regions of the world with which we run a current account surplus, last year amounting to...£2bn for Saudi Arabia alone...last year the Saudi government budget was in surplus to the tune of 20pc of GDP and the country ran a current account surplus of about 27pc of GDP."

"Having twice before enjoyed massive oil bonanzas and spent money like water, thereby quickly turning surpluses into deficits, it is understandable that Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern surplus countries are wary of doing the same thing again. But the young and rapidly growing populations, and the still major requirements for infrastructure improvements throughout the region, suggest that there is a strong case for a major expansion in spending - although it must be better managed than the last two splurges. If this happens the UK is well-placed to benefit strongly."

Jan Moir - 31 October 2007

"While controversy and diplomatic disagreement greet the visit of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to Britain, one important personage missing from the fray is David Miliband. The Foreign Secretary has taken paternity leave following the unexpectedly early birth of his adopted son, Joseph. Interesting. His position is one of the great offices of state, held in the past by the Duke of Wellington, Lord Palmerston and Rab Butler. It is difficult to imagine any of them insisting on time off to bond with babykins, but I suppose we must all accept that times have changed, and not entirely for the better. Would it be nice to depend on the British Foreign Secretary putting our needs and our country's needs before his own? Yes, but when the Me Generation demand Me Time, nothing gets in their way."

David Blair - 30 October 2007

"...if you disapprove of Abdullah, take a look at the people who want to overthrow him. The most likely alternative to the House of Saud is not a collection of benign liberals, desperate to free women and introduce democracy. Instead, the regime's deadliest opponents believe that Saudi Arabia is not nearly repressive or religious enough. They hate the fact that Abdullah educates women and allows them to work. Never mind banning women from driving cars, the royal family's enemies would throw them out of schools and universities."

"The unavoidable reality is that Britain badly needs to keep Saudi Arabia as an ally; hardly any other country is of greater long-term importance."

"Defeating al-Qa'eda or the wider threat posed by global terrorism will be impossible without a strong alliance with Saudi Arabia."

"Abdullah's authority does not rest on his possession of the throne of an absolute monarchy. The basis of his power is his status as Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina, the birthplaces of Islam. This makes him a pivotal figure across the Muslim world."

"The king's consistent denunciations of the 'scourge' of terrorism - he has called al-Qa'eda's 'evil' ideology the 'work of the devil' - carry weight in the Muslim world."

"Osama bin Laden has been the Saudi royal family's most fanatical foe ever since he was expelled from the kingdom and stripped of his citizenship in 1991."

"Saudi Arabia has probably succeeded in crushing most of the al-Qa'eda cells inside its borders. While the possibility of an attack remains, the threat has been greatly reduced...The kingdom runs a sophisticated campaign to rehabilitate terrorists inside its jails. Prisoners are brought before religious scholars who point out their erroneous interpretation of Islam. If judged rehabilitated, ex-terrorists are rewarded with their freedom, a car and a job. Of the roughly 700 detainees who have experienced this course, the failure rate is between 10 and 20 per cent. Given reoffending rates in British jails, we might have something to learn. Spurning one of the few countries that has inflicted a major defeat on al-Qa'eda and that occupies a unique position in the hearts of Muslims might salve a few Western consciences, but it would be a spectacular own goal in the fight against terrorism."

"If the Saudi regime were ever overthrown, its successors would probably be the most fanatical extremists on earth. These are not natural allies of Vincent Cable, the temporary leader of the Lib Dems, who ostentatiously rejected his invitation to attend the state banquet in honour of the king - despite the fact that he spent much of his career working for Shell, which was happy to do business with Saudi Arabia. Mr Cable apparently thinks that taking a salary from an oil company that made handsome profits in Saudi Arabia is fine, but sharing a table with the country's king is unconscionable."

"Britain needs Saudi Arabia's friendship - and King Abdullah is the best hope we have."

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia chides this country for ignoring Riyadh's warnings about the 2005 terrorist bombings in London...In fact, the Saudi king was not really taking our security services to task but making a political point. He was voicing displeasure at the way we are handling relations with his country...It is a crucial bilateral relationship..."

"...the Saudis may even have some useful lessons to teach us about rooting out al-Qa'eda terrorism."

"It may make us feel better to strike moralistic postures about this regime, as the acting leader of the Liberal Democrats, Vincent Cable, has done by boycotting tonight's state banquet at Buckingham Palace. But in the real world, we have to conduct foreign policy on the basis of national self-interest. And in the world's most unstable region, that means a constructive working relationship with Saudi Arabia."

"...the Policy Exchange think tank has uncovered the existence of extremist literature of Saudi origin in many British mosques...yet the Saudis would counter by pointing out that London hosts many exiled groups devoted to the destruction of the Saud family...any alternative regime could be many times worse."

Damien McElroy - 29 October 2007

"As the birthplace of Islam...Saudi Arabia has a unique role in the battle against radicalisation of Muslim youth both in Britain and across the Middle East."

"After many years of trying, King Abdullah persuaded the country's chief mufti, Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Al al-Sheikh, to issue a fatwa earlier this month that banned youths from travelling abroad to carry out jihad."

"King Abdullah...has...gradually made significant steps to transform the austere theocratic nature of the state. Last week the monarch launched the country's first co-ed university, investing £5billion in the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology."

Negative comments – 550 words, 5 items

Roger Bootle - 5 November 2007

"The media coverage of last week's visit by the Saudi king was dominated by protests about his country's human rights record."

"Last year British goods exports to Saudi Arabia amounted to \$3bn. Moreover, the Saudi share of our exports has been declining - this is the lowest since 1974...these figures are not impressive..."

"Having twice before enjoyed massive oil bonanzas and spent money like water, thereby quickly turning surpluses into deficits, it is understandable that Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern surplus countries are wary of doing the same thing again. But the young and rapidly growing populations, and the still major requirements for infrastructure improvements throughout the region, suggest that there is a strong case for a major expansion in spending - although it must be better managed than the last two splurges."

Edmund Conway - 1 November 2007

"Britain's attractiveness as a business destination has been dealt a major blow by growing doubts about its corporate ethics following the scandal surrounding...the Serious Fraud Office's decision to drop a criminal investigation into bribery allegations associated with defence giant BAE and its multi-billion pound deal with Saudi Arabia."

David Blair - 30 October 2007

"Whenever the King of Saudi Arabia pays a state visit to a Western ally, all the ingredients for controversy are present...the absolute monarch of a theocratic state that oppresses women and routinely tortures opponents will never receive a warm public welcome."

"The row over King Abdullah's visit to Britain this week is predictable - and many of the criticisms of Saudi Arabia are justified."

"If we refused to welcome Abdullah, does anyone believe that Saudi Arabia would become a democracy? Would torture disappear from its prisons?"

"Britain's ability to influence the kingdom's internal politics, is virtually zero."

"There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia bears a heavy responsibility for creating bin Laden's brand of Sunni extremism. Throughout the 1980s, the kingdom armed and financed the Mujahideen who fought the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, serving in a war which became the incubator for al-Qa'eda."

"Saudi petrodollars have funded extremist mosques and madrassas worldwide."

"...the monster that the kingdom helped to create turned on its benefactor. Al-Qa'eda mounted a deadly campaign inside Saudi Arabia in 2003 and 2004, carrying out a series of bomb attacks."

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"Accountable to no one, the Saudi royal family relishes discretion, indeed secrecy, in its dealings with foreign powers."

"...the Policy Exchange think tank has uncovered the existence of extremist literature of Saudi origin in many British mosques. This is intolerable..."

"...the Saudi government and its abuse of human rights through the imposition of sharia law may be unpalatable..."

Damien McElroy - 29 October 2007

"King Abdullah, the Saudi Arabian monarch, arrives in London today for a state visit that may spark some of the largest protests against a foreign leader of recent years. Demonstrators plan to stage protests on the Mall and outside the Saudi embassy in Mayfair, highlighting corruption in the arms trade and human rights abuses...For King Abdullah, who likes to advertise his reformist credentials to the West, it is bound to come as an uncomfortable reminder of the international concerns relating to his kingdom."

"As the birthplace of...Osama bin Laden, Saudi Arabia has a unique role in the battle against radicalisation of Muslim youth both in Britain and across the Middle East."

"King Abdullah...has only gradually made significant steps to transform the austere theocratic nature of the state."

Financial Times

Positive comments – 56 words, 2 items

Roula Khalaf - 1 November 2007

"There was ceremonial splendour and much praise at Buckingham Palace and Downing Street, as Britain's most important relationship in the Middle East was celebrated."

Andrew England - 29 October 2007

"An unprecedented construction boom is gaining momentum in Saudi Arabia as highly ambitious, multi-billion-dollar projects to upgrade infrastructure and meet pressing social challenges begin to have an effect...the overall mood is positive."

Negative comments – 415 words, 2 items

Roula Khalaf - 1 November 2007

"Whether out of habit, pressure, or nationalist pride, the Saudi press ignored the controversies that followed King Abdullah's two-day state visit to Britain...Among Saudi officials too, the wave of criticism provoked by the first Saudi royal visit in 20 years was consistently played down...In reality, however, the Saudis were, in the words of one former British diplomat, 'under considerable shock' as they faced the most intense wave of disapproval received by the king on a foreign visit in recent years. The British media went into an anti-Saudi frenzy; protesters jeered the king...demanding that human rights come before arms deals; and the acting leader of the Liberal Democrats refused to attend the state banquet, given by the Queen, in protest at the kingdom's 'appalling human rights record'...even on an official level, there were snags. David Miliband, foreign secretary, failed to show up at a conference...because he was adopting a child in the US...Equally disconcerting was the British government's strong denial of the king's assertion that Riyadh had provided intelligence that might have prevented the July 7 2005 London attacks. Businessmen and analysts travelling with the Saudi delegation said they were taken aback by the force of the criticism. Most startling to them was that the changes the king had been promoting at home, on the social and economic levels, had been totally eclipsed, overtaken by concerns over human rights and religious extremism, issues that have long dogged the image of the kingdom. Yet at least some of the reaction in London was to be expected."

"The government's decision to bow to Saudi pressure and scrap the investigation into the kingdom's purchase of military aircraft provoked a storm in Britain."

"...Saudi women...still face discrimination and cannot vote or drive."

Andrew England - 29 October 2007

"An unprecedented construction boom is gaining momentum in Saudi Arabia as highly ambitious, multi-billion-dollar projects to upgrade infrastructure and meet pressing social challenges begin to have an effect...The kingdom...faces hurdles as it implements its plans, including skilled labour shortages, rising costs and supply bottlenecks...These could affect the pace of growth and cause some projects to be scaled back."

"In spite of its image as a vastly rich country boasting 25 per cent of the world's known oil reserves, Saudi Arabia faces huge challenges as it seeks to improve services, reduce its dependence on oil, broaden the economy beyond the main centres, improve the skills of Saudi workers and tackle unemployment, which is about 12 per cent."

The Guardian

Positive comments – 454 words, 5 items

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"Saudi Arabia is Britain's principal ally in the Middle East, fundamentally involved not just in a trading relationship and the supply of oil, but in Iraq, counter-terrorism and the containment of Iran."

"Saudi Arabia...has a critical role to play in the forthcoming Middle East talks in Annapolis, Maryland."

"If their visit was intended to celebrate relations between the two countries and extend commercial ties, then it went wrong at the start, when David Miliband decided to cancel a meeting with Prince Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi foreign minister, because of his newly adopted second son."

Julian Borger - 30 October 2007

"British and Saudi diplomats agree that the US and Israel have failed to offer a clear enough agenda for the Middle East peace talks that are due to take place next month."

"British and Saudi officials...see eye to eye on Iran. Both would like to see Tehran contained and its nuclear programme stopped, but are uneasy about the consequences of possible US military action."

Richard Norton-Taylor - 30 October 2007

"Arms and intelligence have been at the centre of Britain's unique and close relationship with Saudi Arabia for decades. They still are."

"The Saudis...have an interest...to be seen to be proactive now in the fight against terrorism."

Terry Macalister - 30 October 2007

"Exports from Britain to Saudi Arabia are booming, worth \$9bn (£4.4bn) in 2006 with a 12% year-on-year increase in the first half of this year."

"Marks & Spencer, Tate & Lyle and Rolls Royce are among those doing business with the desert kingdom, where the UK is the second largest foreign investor."

"There are more than 200 UK/Saudi joint ventures run by companies such as HSBC bank and Prudential insurance with total investment worth around \$14.5bn."

"It is estimated that 20,000 British citizens now work and live in the largest Arab economy while a further 125,000 British Muslims attend the Hajj and other religious ceremonies there."

"The controversial Al-Yamamah military jets contract with BAE has continued to make global political headlines for the wrong reasons, but Saudi's role as the world's largest oil producer is not far behind. Despite North Sea oil, the UK buys a lot of crude from this Middle East nation..."

"Saudi Arabia is now pressing ahead with a mass of infrastructure projects to meet the needs of an increasingly restless population that is growing at 3% a year."

"British construction firms are eyeing with interest plans for the world's largest seaport at Jeddah, a \$27bn project to build an industrial city and a 600-mile rail link from east to west coast. With oil prices racing to record levels of \$93 a barrel there is plenty of money to fund these schemes."

Ian Black - 29 October 2007

"King Abdullah...has reformist instincts..."

"Saudi Arabia is Britain's biggest trading partner in the Middle East and the UK is its second biggest foreign investor."

Negative comments – 1,437 words, 5 items

Catherine Bennett - 1 November 2007

"For years...our female emissaries to Saudi Arabia have gone to enormous trouble to fit in. If Mrs Thatcher never sported a kimono in Japan, or dressed up in toasty furs as a compliment to the Inuit, she always put on a long skirt for the Saudis, even if it concealed her best feature. As for our future queen, Camilla arrived in Saudi Arabia last year with a whole new wardrobe of Wahhabi-placating daywear, mainly tunicky things worn over trousers, with flowing scarves providing additional bosom-cover. When in London, however, there is little sign of our royal Saudi visitors taking similar steps to conform. No one expected a suit, but would not the inclusion of a woman or two in King Abdullah's 200-strong entourage have constituted a polite nod towards the British developments that have led to women's suffrage and the right to leave the house with your ankles showing?"

"...given our 'shared values', as Foreign Office minister Kim Howells described them, values which, according to the Queen, unite our two countries in a relationship 'of mutual benefit', the king might...have thought twice before making ungracious comments to John Simpson about our reluctance to catch his home-grown terrorists. Should we, as Vince Cable of the Lib Dems and others believe, refuse to welcome this singularly ill-mannered dictator?...Too late. King Abdullah goes home tomorrow, and how one wishes he could take Kim 'shared values' Howells back with him. From Prince Charles, with his history of woman trouble, one has come to expect this creepy respect for an absolute ruler with 30 wives. From Howells, who presumes, no doubt, to be a progressive politician, the reflexive, Foreign Office cringe is more disturbing. What if the more persecuted half of the Saudi population were black? Would he have talked about 'shared values' in the days of Pik Botha? Is it because only half its population is oppressed that we share values with Saudi Arabia, but none with Burma? Of course Howells is not alone in considering the complete subjugation of Saudi women to be a kind of quirky, cultural difference, rather than an outrage. From their silence, one can only conclude that his female colleagues, despite their newly acquired desire to 'unlock the potential' of British Muslim women, also consider Abdullah's oppression of their entire sex too insignificant to jeopardise future arms deals...Although, after his rudeness, protracted exposure to the Princess Royal and Princess Michael of Kent over a cooling dish of 'broccoli hollandaise' might seem to be just what King Abdullah deserves, a more suitable event would surely see his own entourage swamped by a superior number of Labour's female politicians. At least, it would if there were more than 97. But it would be a simple matter to send out for professional reinforcements, thus demonstrating to King Abdullah that, whatever the Prince of Wales may have told him in the dunes, our shared values do not, currently, feature male supremacy. Instead of Prince Charles fawning on the airstrip, one pictures, say, Sandi Toksvig, heading a welcoming party composed of adulterers, gays, Jews, Catholics, apostates, immodestly dressed women and a variety of other law-abiding sinners who would be dead, or at least severely incapacitated, if they lived in King

Abdullah's country. After inspecting a battalion of beautifully turned out slugs (replacing the Welsh Guards), he and his companions would be driven - by women drivers of Filipina extraction - to a special performance of the Vagina Monologues, after which a female journalist (replacing John Simpson), would explore the extent of our shared values on behalf of the BBC."

"Given the obvious difficulties if the government received only enlightened foreign dignitaries, it might make more sense to forget the pretext for the Saudi king's visit, and focus on the arrangements."

"...even where the insults to women's rights are debated, there is a habitual stress on the prohibition on driving, as if we held the right to be the next Jeremy Clarkson to be self-evident. Would access to the Land Cruiser somehow compensate for never leaving the house uncovered, and being sentenced, at birth, to have no vote, no freedom of movement and, compared to the lowliest Saudi man, no independence and no free will? Perhaps it is the straightforward contrast, between the fully licensed British woman and her de-motorised Saudi contemporary, that leads to this particular difference being so often cited."

"If, as we're often told, many British Muslim women love their jilbabs, how can we be sure Saudi women do not also rejoice in their coverings, accepting, in the same dutiful spirit, total exclusion from civic life and physical chastisement by their devout partners? How can we be sure their would-be liberators are not - like women who adorn themselves and women who cut their hair short - just a few more Women Who Will Go to Hell?"

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"Diplomacy often calls for pretence and evasion to further the needs of nations but rarely in such public fashion as this week. The state visit to Britain by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is an expression of base politics and supposed mutual advantage, lacking the honour and glory that ought to characterise such events. It was exposed as such even before the Saudi monarch and the many princes and aides who accompanied him landed at Heathrow."

"Nor did King Abdullah's remarks...in a BBC interview suggest a visit based on mutual respect. He claimed to have provided information that could have stopped terrorist attacks in 2005. Downing Street immediately and correctly disagreed."

"Without even a show of harmony, Britain is treating its Saudi visitors to gilded carriages and a royal banquet not because of any real respect, but because of their oil wealth and strategic position."

"Morality clearly lies with the protesters expected to gather in London today, whose criticism of Saudi Arabia's human rights record is well placed. The Foreign Office itself does not question it...This week, it says, is not the time to discuss such issues. That sits uncomfortably with the prime minister's promise in his conference speech: 'The message should go out to anyone facing persecution ... human rights are universal and no injustice can last forever'. Squaring such a bold claim with the unpleasant charade of the current state visit is impossible."

"Realpolitik is supposed to produce benefits. As Britain's royal and political elite pay homage to the ruler of an intolerant, brutal and theocratic regime, it is worth asking exactly what those benefits are."

"Saudi Arabia is Britain's principal ally in the Middle East...Successive British governments have exempted Saudi Arabia from laws and moral judgments that are applied to other nations because of this importance. This has happened most ostentatiously in the favouritism shown to BAE Systems. Last

month the company completed a deal to sell 72 Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft to Saudi Arabia for £4.43bn. That followed the attorney general's notorious decision to call off a fraud investigation into BAE's previous al-Yamamah contract...This summer the Guardian reported, too, that BAE Systems had paid hundreds of millions of pounds to Prince Bandar bin Sultan, now King Abdullah's security adviser. He...is staying with the Saudi monarch at Buckingham Palace: a treatment that suggests Britain does not believe, or more likely does not care about, the accusations being made against him."

"The government is sticking to a policy sustained since the 1980s: 'Do nothing to upset the Saudi royal family.' It must go down as one of Britain's most dubious but most long-lived goals. It has not done much to help the people of Saudi Arabia and nor has it prevented the spread of terrorism: Osama bin Laden is Saudi; so were 15 of the suicide bombers on September 11 2001."

Richard Norton-Taylor - 30 October 2007

"Saudi money helped to prop up the Taliban and fuel the spread of Islamist extremism in the madrasas of Afghanistan and Pakistan."

"Osama bin Laden is a Saudi, and 15 of the 19 hijackers of the airliners involved in the September 11 2001 attacks on the US were Saudis."

Terry Macalister - 30 October 2007

"The Saudis, influential players in the Opec oil cartel which has helped force up prices, have jealously guarded their oil wealth which provides the government in Riyadh with most of the \$101bn earmarked for public spending this year. Despite endless promises to review this policy, few foreign companies have been allowed to play any part in exploration and production of oil or gas."

"Fifteen per cent of Saudis, many of them young, are believed to be unemployed at a time when radical Islamists encourage them to seek a change in the allegedly Western-facing policies of the ruling royal family."

Ian Black - 29 October 2007

"...progress in the kingdom has been halting."

"...the kingdom's image remains poor."

The Independent

Positive comments – 604 words, 4 items

Adrian Hamilton - 1 November 2007

"There is little difference in kind between Saudi's public execution and America's much-publicised methods of judicial murder."

"Whether demanding reform from the outside does much good is a moot point. It can help push social reforms that the ruling elite might wish in any case, such as women's rights opposed more by conservative religious and tribal forces than government interest. Democracy is more difficult because it threatens the whole network of family and tribal alliances on which the royal regime is based. It could also unleash the very forces of extremism inside Saudi Arabia which are currently being bought off at home if not abroad."

"...Saudi Arabia is...outgrowing...the need to buy protection from Western powers."

"King Abdullah...is presented as a force for reform. That may be true in a modest sense. He does want to modernise his country."

"King Abdullah...has developed a genuinely independent policy towards the Middle East. To the shock of Washington and the surprise of many in the region, Saudi Arabia under his rule has refused to become an instrument of the West's vision of a Sunni-Shia split to combat Iran or to follow tamely Washington and Jerusalem's idea of a Middle East peace based on a divided Palestine. He has thrown his considerable weight behind an overall settlement based on the 1967 borders, has kept up relations with Tehran and continued vehemently to oppose Western occupation of Iraq."

"In the profoundly depressing politics of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has emerged as a real, and, I think, constructive player. This week's royal visit, with all the protests, the Government's obvious desire to distance itself from it and the Foreign Secretary's ill-advised cancellation of a meeting with his Saudi opposite number, is not just a distraction but a positive liability to that."

Malise Ruthven - 30 October 2007

"The Saudi monarchy...may be...opposed to the current manifestations of jihadism in Europe and America."

"...the Al-Saud family eventually turned against the more radical tribal forces which brought them to power, defeating them in 1929..."

Nigel Morris - 29 October 2007

"From Margaret Thatcher onwards, prime ministers have been in no doubt about Saudi Arabia's crucial importance to the UK government."

"Over the years a policy of pragmatism has come to characterise all dealings between London and Riyadh."

"Saudi Arabia, historically a close ally of the UK, is Britain's largest export market in the region, buying goods and services worth more than £3.5bn annually."

"British financial interests in joint ventures in the desert kingdom are estimated to be worth £7bn, with HSBC, Shell and BAE Systems among recent investors."

"Some 20,000 Britons work in Saudi Arabia and countless thousands more in this country directly rely on Saudi orders for their living. In the world of realpolitik, there is a further argument for the Government in staying on good terms with the country that produces more than one-eighth of the world's oil. The dilemma facing Government ministers, who 10 years ago promised to introduce an 'ethical dimension' into foreign policy, was thrown into dramatic relief when Tony Blair controversially abandoned a long-running fraud investigation into the £40bn Al-Yamamah BAE arms deal between the two countries."

"The nightmare scenario is that the Saudi royals...are toppled and replaced by vitriolic anti-western extremists."

"...members of the Royal family and Government ministers are constantly flying to Saudi Arabia, a familiarity that helps them to stay on the best of terms with their opposite numbers. During 2005, for example, eight ministers visited, including Mr Brown, John Reid (twice) and Mr Blair (twice) as well as the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York."

Vince Cable - 29 October 2007

"Saudi Arabia has intelligence to share and help us combat terrorism. Genuine two-way co-operation is, of course, welcome."

Negative comments – 2,900 words, 8 items

Paul Vallely - 1 November 2007

"...concerns are growing within Muslim circles about the increased reach of Wahhabism, Saudi's obscurantist and intolerant form of Islam in which Osama Bin Laden has his roots. There are fears for the increasingly baleful influence it may be having on young British Muslims."

"...the Saudis...accelerated their aggressive missionary work - targeting China and Russia as well as the UK - in reaction to the activities of Iran in the 1980s...The Saudis had already been pump-priming Islamic terrorists to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan, at the behest of the Americans and funding among other things the schools in Pakistan that gave rise to the radicalism of the Taliban. But the Saudis lost control of this new global Wahhabism."

"Since 9/11 the Saudis have begun to row back on their funding of fundamentalism abroad, according to Mehmood Naqshbandi, the Muslim advisor to the City of London police. Too late. The damage has been done."

"The Saudis do not call themselves Wahhabis. That is largely a derogatory term applied by their opponents. Many Saudi religious leaders insist on calling themselves just Muslims, extending the implication that Muslims who do not share their particular interpretation of Islam are not proper Muslims at all."

"...terrorism needs only a tiny number of adepts to be devastatingly effective. And the fear is that the Saudis have created an ideological framework which makes that more possible."

Adrian Hamilton - 1 November 2007

"There is something terribly old-fashioned about King Abdullah's state visit to Britain and the fuss it has engendered. Old fashioned and wrong...What is wrong in this case is that it is exactly the sort of overblown occasion which the Saudis themselves should be avoiding, never mind their hosts. Saudi Arabia's lack of human rights is just a red herring. If that were the key point we should refuse President Bush for Guantanamo, rendition and the extensive use of the death penalty in the US...The trouble with the sort of royal pomp and ceremony which we are witnessing this week is that it plays into the worst of this particular relationship. All this gaudy ritual serves to confirm the British in their sense that they are keeping a corrupt and rapacious regime happy with ceremony and baubles, and the Saudis in their sense that British support has been safely bought."

"Saudi Arabia has become rich on oil exports. Fearful of the fates that have befallen the Shah of Iran and the Kings of Iraq, Libya and Egypt, the house of Saud has chosen to use that wealth to buy off every conceivable threat and purchase the loyalty of every conceivable ally. Hence the problem of the Wahhabi religious establishment, given huge subventions to propagate its form of Islam abroad on condition that it didn't stir things up at home. Hence the wealth of the now thousands of princes and tribal leaders in the country. And hence too the huge contracts given to those it sees as its allies - the US and then Britain, with France, Japan and others drawn into the net. You can call it bribery, but to the Saudi royals it is a matter of everyday insurance. The trouble is that it corrupts everyone who comes in contact, particularly Western companies and politicians. But it also corrupts the body politic of Saudi Arabia itself, suppressing dissent, making the regime endlessly accommodating to extremist factions...and cutting off development of a domestic economy and the educated, professional middle class who are emerging elsewhere in the Gulf."

"Britain should have outgrown its need to beg and grovel for foreign arms contracts and to keep in with Riyadh in order to preserve a special importance in the Middle East, which we no longer have."

"King Abdullah...is presented as a force for reform. That may be true in a modest sense...But in his eighties, he is probably too old to take on the vested interested that would block real institutional change, even if he felt it in his interest to do so."

Mark Steel - 31 October 2007

"That should stop those liberal types who complain we don't do enough to welcome people who leave a country that practises persecution. Admittedly, with King Abdullah, he's the person who organises the persecution, but the main point is we made an effort. I wondered whether, to make him feel even more at home, we might behead a couple of adulteresses in Pall Mall...Instead, Foreign Office minister Kim Howells assured him we have 'shared values' with His Majesty. He could have added: 'For example we've decided not to have an election, and so has he'."

"The visit...reminds us of Tony Blair justifying the invasion of Afghanistan by referring to its 'appalling record on women's rights'. Which is why we offer a state visit for the King of Saudi Arabia, as his kingdom is the world centre for radical feminism. For example they insist you say a woman has been stoned to death and never a bird. And women are so revered there, they're not allowed to drive, which means they're the only people in the world who can't be punished for drinking and driving, as they'd be executed for either one so they might as well do both at the same time."

"...the awkward part to the King's visit is how confusing it must be for poor President Ahmadinejad of Iran. He doesn't grab anywhere near as many weapons and gets in all sorts of trouble."

"A cynic might wonder whether this cheery relationship with the Saudis might be connected to the weapons they buy off us, which might also explain why we don't worry that their dealings with us are riddled with corruption. Lord Gilmour wrote of the time he was defence secretary: 'You either got the business and bribed, or you didn't bribe and didn't get the business.' And when you put it like that, what else can any man do but bribe a dictator to sell him warehouse-loads of tanks?"

"The former managing director of Thorn defence systems, which admitted to paying 25 per cent 'commissions' on a £40m arms deal, said: 'I don't know of a Saudi royal who'll get out of bed for less than 5 per cent.' So they must have the same agents as supermodels and Premier League footballers. Presumably they get a bit extra for their image rights as well, and sort out sponsorship deals where they say: 'People often ask me how I have the energy to buy five Eurofighter Typhoon jets in one morning, and I always answer 'Lucozade Sports Drink' - it brings a good vibe to a good bribe'."

Malise Ruthven - 30 October 2007

"King Abdullah's complaint that British authorities ignored Saudi warnings of an imminent attack on the UK before the atrocities of 7 July 2005 might be more convincing if they came from the ruler of a country less sympathetic to the Islamist agenda."

"Since the 1970s, when rising oil revenues enabled the Saudis to export the Wahhabi brand of fundamentalist Sunni Islam, Saudi Arabia has been a major exporter of ideas and values that differ from those espoused by Osama bin Laden and his followers on issues of strategy, but not on the broader perspectives."

"During its years of rivalry with Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt, the Saudi government nurtured leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood which President Nasser had forced underground after an attempt on his life in 1954. Those exiled from Egypt included Muhammad Qutb, the brother of Sayyid Qutb - the Brotherhood's leading intellectual. His writings have helped to inspire a wave of terror attacks, from the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981 to the more recent attacks on New York, Madrid and London. While Muhammad became a shade more moderate than his more famous brother, who was executed 1966, they shared the fundamental belief, which is incompatible with modern pluralism, that Islam (in its narrow, political version) is the only religion for humanity."

"Fifteen of the 19 hijackers on 11 September 2001 were Saudi citizens."

"The Saudi monarchy, always vulnerable to the charge of corruption, nepotism and cosying up to the infidel West to protect its interests, may be belatedly opposed to the current manifestations of jihadism in Europe and America. But its very existence is the result of a successful jihadist movement launched by the kingdom's founder Ibn Saud between 1906 and 1926. The movement was built around an alliance between a tribal confederation led by the Al Saud family and followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, an 18th-century preacher who sought to purge Arabian Islam of alien influences, including devotional practices which had grown up in the centuries since the death of Muhammad in 632. The Wahhabi tribesmen who in 1924 conquered the Hijaz, the western part of what is now Saudi Arabia, were merciless."

"...the Al-Saud family...remain vulnerable to the charge of selling out on the Wahhabi religious ideology."

"Women are still banned from driving..."

"...the notorious religious police enforce public morals so strictly that in March 2002 they allowed 14 schoolgirls to die when their school caught fire, rather than allow them to leave the building without the proper Islamic dress."

"In the 1990s, the Saudis actively supported the Taliban, with whom they have natural affinities..."

"...the Saudis...are still influential supporters of the Salafist ideas that inform the followers of political Islam in the West."

"King Abdullah has said it may take 30 years to defeat terrorism in his country. Unfortunately, terrorism is the sharp end of ideological forces in his kingdom that are much more entrenched."

"Although Saudi Arabia is rich enough to buy the latest weapons (with suitable commissions for princes) and modern technology, the Enlightenment ideas underpinning modern culture are mostly kept at bay. Terrorism is not just a threat to be countered by force. It is a by-product of the cultural schizophrenia that Saudis are helping to promote."

Robert Fisk - 30 October 2007

"...a backhander...is the Saudi way of doing business."

"...for King Abdullah to tell the world...that Britain is not doing enough to counter 'terrorism', and that most countries are not taking it as seriously as his country is, is really pushing it. Weren't most of the 11 September 2001 hijackers from - er - Saudi Arabia? Is this the land that is really going to teach us lessons?"

"The sheer implausibility of the claim that Saudi intelligence could have prevented the London bombings if only the British Government had taken it seriously, seems to have passed the Saudi monarch by...This claim is frankly incredible. The sad, awful truth is that we fete these people, we fawn on them, we supply them with fighter jets, whisky and whores."

"...Saudi Arabia is no democracy. Yet how many times have we been encouraged to think otherwise about a state that will not even allow its women to drive?"

"Kim Howells, the Foreign Office minister, was telling us again yesterday that we should work more closely with the Saudis, because we 'share values' with them. And what values precisely would they be, I might ask?"

"Saudi Arabia is a state which bankrolled...Saddam's legions as they invaded Iran in 1980 (with our Western encouragement, let it be added)."

"Saudi Arabia...said nothing - a total and natural silence - when Saddam swamped the Iranians with gas. Did the Saudi royal family protest?...No. The then Keeper of the Two Holy Places was perfectly happy to allow gas to be used because he was paying for it - components were supplied, of course, by the US - while the Iranians died in hell."

"...we Brits are supposed to be not keeping up with our Saudi friends when they are 'cracking down on terrorism'. Like the Saudis were so brilliant in cracking down on terror in 1979 when hundreds of gunmen poured into the Great Mosque at Mecca, an event so mishandled by a certain commander of the Saudi National Guard called Prince Abdullah that they had to call in toughs from a French intervention force. And it was a former National Guard officer who led the siege."

"Saudi Arabia's role in the 9/11 attacks has still not been fully explored. Senior members of the royal family expressed the shock and horror expected of them, but no attempt was made to examine the nature of Wahhabism, the state religion, and its inherent contempt for all representation of human activity or death."

"It was Saudi Muslim legal iconoclasm which led directly to the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan by the Taliban, Saudi Arabia's friends."

"...only weeks after Kamal Salibi, a Lebanese history professor, suggested in the late 1990s that once-Jewish villages in what is now Saudi Arabia might have been locations in the Bible, the Saudis sent bulldozers to destroy the ancient buildings there."

"In the name of Islam, Saudi organisations have destroyed hundreds of historic structures in Mecca and Medina...Were the twin towers in New York another piece of architecture which Wahhabis wanted to destroy?"

"...Wahhabi puritanism meant that Saudi Arabia would always throw up men who believe they had been chosen to 'cleanse' their society from corruption, yet Abdul Wahhab also preached that royal rulers should not be overthrown. Thus the Saudis were unable to confront the duality, that protection-and-threat that Wahhabism represented for them."

"Amnesty International has appealed for hundreds of men - and occasionally women - to be spared the Saudi executioner's blade. They have all been beheaded, often after torture and grossly unfair trials. Women are shot."

Johann Hari - 29 October 2007

"This week, Gordon Brown and David Cameron will welcome the leader of one of the world's most vicious dictatorships to Britain. Both men will embrace King Abdullah al-Saud...Yet both political leaders refuse to make a commitment to even mention human rights to the king. Instead, he will ride in a golden carriage with the Queen, and be guest of honour at a Buckingham Palace banquet. It is the start of a three-day state visit, funded by the British taxpayer."

"While King Abdullah is cheered by our political leaders, many of his victims will be protesting outside...the torturer will be inside Buckingham Palace, and his victims left outside, alone."

"...life in Saudi Arabia is worst of all for women...all women are kept in effect under house arrest. They are banned from driving, from leaving the house without a male guardian, even in a medical emergency, or from holding a passport. Whenever women try to struggle free from these rules, the 'Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice' - a posse of uniformed thugs who stalk the streets - beat them with batons."

"The House of Saud's dysfunctions are not contained within the Arabian peninsula; they are burning their way out across the world - and backfiring on Britain."

"In order to appease their own internal Wahabbi-Islamist extremists, the Saudi dictatorship is handing them tens of billions of oil-dollars to promote their vision across the globe."

"The Saudi dictatorship is slowly poisoning global Islam, ensuring the most austere and fanatical desert vision liquidates the softer, more mystical strands - and we are already seeing this backfire on to the streets of London and New York."

"The truth is that the British Government - and all Western societies - are so addicted to Saudi Arabia's oil that they feel they can't speak back. They are terrified of seeing the petrol that lubricates our economy (or the arms deals that butter it) being turned off, as it was in 1973 oil crisis. It is only by making a rapid transition away from our dependence on fossil fuels that this depraved relationship with a tyranny can be unpicked - but the Government shows no sign of doing this, preferring to stick to the old exchange of sycophancy, arms deals and crude oil."

Nigel Morris - 29 October 2007

"British leaders have been prepared to live with the poor record on human rights abuses and the treatment of women by the Saudis because of what has been regarded as this country's strategic and economic interests."

"...Osama bin Laden and most of the September 11 co-conspirators were Saudi-born..."

"...the Saudi royals...enraged some of their neighbours by allowing American jets to be stationed in the country during the first Gulf war..."

Vince Cable - 29 October 2007

"...I do object to the Saudi state visit and have therefore declined an invitation to attend. The British government should not have offered the accolade of a state visit to the head of a regime which is authoritarian and deeply corrupt...I had hoped that Gordon Brown's government would have higher standards. It seems not."

"British expatriates have been tortured to extract false confessions of involvement in terrorism. Why, then, should the Government involve the Queen in a public display of friendship and respect for the head of the House of Saud?"

"...earlier this year, Parliament was told by Tony Blair that unless the British government dropped a criminal investigation into alleged corruption involving BAE systems and leading Saudi princes, the Saudis would cease co-operation. It is a dubious ally which tries to blackmail us over terrorism to save their royal blushes."

"Trade...is beneficial but not at any price and not if it is lubricated by bribery and government subsidy. The massive Al Yamamah arms contract, spanning two decades, has left a deep stain on British public life. Conservative and Labour governments have been complicit in large-scale corruption. Our legal system has been compromised by a refusal, under Saudi pressure, to pursue fraud investigations. Parliament has been compromised by the suppression of a Public Accounts Committee inquiry, which could embarrass the Saudis - the only such report thus suppressed in the history of parliament."

The Times

Positive comments – 1,180 words, 3 items

Editorial - 31 October 2007

"The boycott by Vincent Cable, the acting Liberal Democrat leader, of the state visit by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is as pointless as it is discourteous. The Government's own stance, however, has been less than wholly welcoming: David Miliband is, of course, perfectly entitled to take time off to attend the birth of an adopted child; but to withdraw from a state occasion at very short notice is, to say the least, unfortunate."

"State visits are important ceremonial and symbolic occasions, intended to underpin a relationship of value to both countries. This visit has been treated as though Saudi Arabia were an unpleasant and embarrassing regime from which Britain is emphatically eager to distance itself. It is important, therefore, to restate...the strategic interest that Britain has in maintaining a smooth relationship with the House of Saud."

"Saudi Arabia is, by far, this country's most important political and economic partner in the Middle East."

"Saudi Arabia...is pivotal to the settlement of all three conflicts destabilising this troubled region: the Israeli-Palestinian question, the turmoil in Iraq and the threat that Iran's attempt to build a nuclear weapon poses to all its neighbours."

"Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil producer, and a crucial force in attempting to maintain reliable supplies at predictable prices."

"Saudi Arabia...is the land from which Islam emanated and which guards the sacred shrines of one of the world's great religions."

"The King is elderly, cautious and courteous. He deserves to be received and heard with courtesy."

"The importance of British trade with Saudi Arabia cannot be overestimated. British exports were worth £4.4 billion last year, more than the total to all the other countries in the Middle East."

"The £25 billion al-Yamamah defence contract is the largest overseas defence deal Britain has ever concluded, or is ever likely to conclude. And although the alleged pay-offs to a Saudi prince are embarrassing and the manner in which the investigation was quashed was extremely unusual, the egg is on British, rather than Saudi, faces."

"...Riyadh's...diplomacy has, for years, been marked by excessive caution and a habit of using its wealth to buy the peace of every dubious Arab leader or extremist faction. That has changed. The Saudis have become bolder and more ready to engage in the issues."

"It was King Abdullah's plan for a comprehensive settlement with Israel that formed the basis of the Arab peace proposals five years ago, and it is this plan that Israel itself now regards as a realistic foundation for talks. And although the Saudis have no relations with Israel, they are ready to attend the proposed summit with Israel, provided all sides can overcome the bickering over the agenda. Britain,

long engaged in the search for a regional settlement, recognises that Saudi moderation is crucial if the wider Muslim world is to accept a deal."

"In confronting Iran, in influencing the Iraqi Sunnis and in the fight against Islamist terrorism, Saudi Arabia is crucial."

"...the House of Saud has robustly fought extremism in its own conservative society; and it is hardly up to Britain to dictate the pace of change. In the country's present circumstances, would democracy have a better chance under an alternative Islamist government?"

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"King Abdullah's state visit to London has got off to a shaky start after...the bizarre boycott by publicity-seeking Liberal Democrats. But he has been a friend to Britain, and is in a battle with Islamist extremism."

Amir Taheri - 30 October 2007

"The decision by Vince Cable, the acting leader of the Liberal Democrats, to boycott the state visit of King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz al Saud may win plaudits from the supporters of gesture politics. But gesture politics will not alter the fact that Saudi Arabia is Britain's largest trading partner in the Middle East and the single biggest customer of its arms. Nor would it change the strategic reality that the kingdom sits atop a quarter of the world's oil reserves or that the West needs Saudi co-operation to uproot the Islamist terror...The truth is that we need to maintain close ties with the country while encouraging its still tentative, fragile attempts to reform itself."

"...women account for 55 per cent of all those in higher education...the share of wealth owned by Saudi women is higher than that of women in most EU countries."

"Today Saudi Arabia is the only Arab country not to have a form of elected parliament. However, that does not mean that Saudi decision-making is less broadly based than it is in, say, Egypt or Syria..."

"...the kingdom has already taken its first timid steps towards elections by allowing half of the members of municipal councils to be chosen by male voters. There is also talk about extending the system to the Consultative Assembly, an appointed parliament that has grown in power and prestige since its inception in 1993."

"...some Saudi school textbooks preached militancy and hatred of Christians, Jews and non-believers. However, that begun to change in 2003 when the kingdom itself became the target of attacks by al-Qaeda...Since then an estimated 800 al-Qaeda terrorists have been killed or captured and many more put through 'retraining courses' designed to deradicalise them and weave them back into normal life."

"Over the past four years the Saudi offices of at least 20 groups suspected of terrorism have been closed and their assets seized. (Ironically, some of these groups have transferred to Washington DC.)"

"Saudi Arabia has...started a revision of its schoolbooks that, though not complete, has already done away with some of the most obnoxious texts."

"The chiaroscuro of Saudi life could be better understood if we remember that the kingdom is not ruled by a monolithic elite. The Royal Family, believed to number more than 10,000, including the more

distant members, is as divided on most issues as society at large. Also associated with decision-making are tribal chiefs and business leaders. More recently a number of 'councils' have been set up to advise the king on social, cultural, economic and human rights issues. These too are steadily gaining in power and prestige. A number of professional associations, where the leadership is elected by secret ballot, are also securing a growing say in how the country is governed."

"An ambitious reform plan for the judiciary is under way with the aim of basing the kingdom's legal system on the values spelt out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

"A new, increasingly wealthy and self-confident middle class is taking shape in all parts of the kingdom, including the long-neglected south, where most jihadists come from. In the years to come, this new middle class is certain to provide the social base for more ambitious reforms."

"...Saudi Arabia is not likely to become a Western-style democracy any time soon. And there is no evidence that a majority of Saudis would want such a system."

"Saudi Arabia...can and must be pressed to do away with those aspects of its social structure that King Abdullah himself describes as outdated. As the Arab proverb has it: the camel is not the most congenial of travel companions, but it is the most trustworthy."

Negative comments – 688 words, 4 items

Editorial - 31 October 2007

"The £25 billion al-Yamamah defence contract is the largest overseas defence deal Britain has ever concluded, or is ever likely to conclude...the alleged pay-offs to a Saudi prince are embarrassing and the manner in which the investigation was quashed was extremely unusual..."

"...Riyadh's...diplomacy has, for years, been marked by excessive caution and a habit of using its wealth to buy the peace of every dubious Arab leader or extremist faction."

"Saudi Arabia...has been far too slow to realise the dangers of funding Muslim extremism; and there is much still that it needs to do in domestic, judicial and democratic reform."

Editorial - 30 October 2007

"It is surprising that so little is known about so much of the literature circulating in British mosques...So the first academic survey of such literature makes intriguing reading. It finds inflammatory writings in some of the most respected mosques, about half of them in English...The bulk of the material featured in this report seems to be connected with Saudi Arabia: either published and distributed by Saudi institutions, or found in Saudi-funded mosques, or written by members of the Wahhabite religious establishment."

"King Abdullah's state visit to London has got off to a shaky start after his claims that the British ignored Saudi information about terrorists...The Prime Minister must ask him to find a way to halt the export and funding of extremist material that has no place in British society."

Sean O'Neill - 30 October 2007

"Books calling for the beheading of lapsed Muslims, ordering women to remain indoors and forbidding interfaith marriage are being sold inside some of Britain's leading mosques, according to research seen by The Times. Some of the fundamentalist works were found at the bookshop in the London Central mosque in Regent's Park, which is funded by the Saudi regime and is regularly visited by government ministers. Its director, Ahmad al-Dubayan, is also a Saudi diplomat and was among those greeting King Abdullah when he arrived in Britain last night for his official state visit."

Amir Taheri - 30 October 2007

"...the West needs Saudi co-operation to uproot the Islamist terror, a monster they both created before becoming its joint victims."

"Saudi Arabia's critics level three key charges against it. The first is that it has used its enormous oil income to finance Islamic groups that, in turn, produce and sustain jihadists in a global campaign of terror. According to this criticism, Saudi largesse produces a system like the Russian matryoshka dolls, in which large Islamic charities act as covers for small well-hidden terrorist outfits. There is some truth in that charge...The second charge is that women are treated shoddily - Saudi Arabia, for instance, is the only country where the female of the species is not allowed to drive a car...The third charge concerns democracy. Today Saudi Arabia is the only Arab country not to have a form of elected parliament."

"During the 1980s the kingdom, in tandem with the United States, helped to finance the Mujahidin in Afghanistan who, in turn, gave birth to terrorist groups from Algeria to the Philippines."

"Even after the 9/11 attacks, the kingdom refused to close charities with questionable aims."

"Disturbingly, some Saudi school textbooks preached militancy and hatred of Christians, Jews and non-believers."

"Taken by surprise and lacking the personnel and technical means to respond to terrorism, the kingdom had to suffer many deaths before it started to fight back."

"One reason for the slow pace of reform has been the absence of a sizeable middle class to seek political rights that match their economic clout. Until just a decade ago whatever the kingdom had in the form of a middle class was limited to the Hijaz, a cosmopolitan area on the Red Sea with a tradition of relative liberalism. The rest of the kingdom, a country the size of Western Europe, was almost frozen in traditional, often tribal, structures."

"...Saudi Arabia is not likely to become a Western-style democracy any time soon."

"Saudi Arabia...can and must be pressed to do away with those aspects of its social structure that King Abdullah himself describes as outdated. As the Arab proverb has it: the camel is not the most congenial of travel companions, but it is the most trustworthy."